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Annual report for 2017 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the UNICEF evaluation function in 2017. It outlines progress in providing the necessary evaluation evidence for organizational learning and accountability achieved under the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2013/14) and during the period of implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017. The report also provides an update on the governance of the evaluation function and its contribution to system-wide coherence in evaluation. It presents a detailed analysis of the performance of the evaluation function at all levels of the organization, and includes a synopsis of the key findings of several corporate evaluations.

Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VIII.

* E/ICEF/2018/8.

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I. Introduction

1. Profound changes in the environment in which UNICEF operates continue to shape the organization's work, requiring it to learn, adapt and improve continuously. These changes are placing ever-greater demands on accountability mechanisms for delivering better results. The Secretary-General has repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance of evaluation, calling for specific measures to strengthen evaluation both within United Nations entities and across the entire system. In April 2016, the Secretary-General highlighted the need for an independent and fully transparent culture of evaluation, and urged the system to make greater use of real-time evaluations. In his December 2017 report on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet (A/72/684–E/2018/7), the Secretary-General further committed to strengthening system-wide evaluation. These and other global developments informed the direction that the UNICEF evaluation function pursued in 2017.

2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR; General Assembly resolution 71/243) and the priorities identified for the last year of the organization's Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 have specific implications for the generation of evidence on what works in pursuit of the global goals, including the need to strengthen national evaluation capacity. In addition, the scale and complexity of humanitarian crises require the organization to generate more systematic and timely evidence on what works best for children and their families in such contexts.

3. The present report provides an overview of progress, achievements and challenges relative to the UNICEF evaluation function as it responded to these demands in 2017. It covers the governance of the evaluation function and its contribution to system-wide coherence and summarizes the performance of the function in relation to the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 targets for evaluation, the revised evaluation policy (E/ICEF/2013/14) and the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014–2017. The report provides summary updates on the implementation of the management response to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)-United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) peer review of the evaluation function of UNICEF (2017). It also highlights key findings and lessons learned from corporate evaluations.

II. Governance of the evaluation function

4. Evaluation in UNICEF is aimed at fostering learning about what works best in achieving results for children and providing the evidence necessary to strengthen performance management and accountability. Evaluations are carried out at all levels of the organization, with the majority taking place at the country level. The Evaluation Office will more systematically engage with country and regional offices to share key lessons emanating from evaluations.

5. In accordance with the UNICEF evaluation policy, the governance of the function in 2017 involved several actors. The Executive Board continued to oversee the organization's work, providing direction to the evaluation function and using evaluation findings to strengthen accountability. The Executive Director continued to promote a culture of accountability, learning and continuous improvement and to allocate human and financial resources to the function.

6. The Evaluation Office continued to oversee the function, including: (a) preparing and leading the implementation of the evaluation policy, which sets standards for evaluations; (b) providing technical guidance and quality assurance to headquarters divisions and regional and country offices; and (c) fostering partnerships, knowledge management and capacity development, with the ultimate aim of promoting learning and continuous improvement in the organization. The Evaluation Office also commissioned and managed corporate evaluations in support of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 and other global policies and strategies. Those evaluations are identified in the global plan for thematic evaluations 2014–2017. Corporate evaluations completed or initiated in 2017 are discussed in section V of the report.

7. The external Audit Advisory Committee was expanded in 2017 to include a global expert in evaluation, allowing the committee to further strengthen its oversight of the evaluation function, including ensuring adherence to the norms and standards set out in the evaluation policy.

8. In addition, pursuant to one of the recommendations of the DAC-UNEG peer review, the external Evaluation Advisory Panel, made up of external experts who provide independent advice to the Director of Evaluation, was constituted in late 2017 and met for the first time in January 2018; it will convene twice per year. Serving for a period of three years, the experts represent diverse geographical areas and institutional backgrounds. The panel's duties include advising the Director on policy matters, such as the preparation and roll-out of the revised evaluation policy and the plan for global evaluations; recommending improvements to evaluation methodologies, procedures, quality-assurance mechanisms and management responses; and suggesting innovative ways to improve the conduct and use of evaluations, including improvements to knowledge-sharing and dissemination.

9. The Global Evaluation Committee, an internal body that advises senior management on the relevance and use of evaluations, was particularly instrumental in creating and sustaining the demand for evaluations in 2017. The committee met several times to assess progress in the implementation of management responses, paying particular attention to the recommendations of the peer review. The Evaluation Office also consulted the committee in the formulation of the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 and the new revision of the evaluation policy.

10. Divisional and regional directors and regional evaluation advisers, together with country representatives and specialists, continued to generate vital evidence and facilitate its use, in line with the norms and standards of UNEG. The Director of Evaluation worked with regional directors to begin the process of recruiting two of three new regional evaluation advisers, in accordance with the management response to the peer review report and provisions in the integrated budget, 2018–2021. The recruitment of the new advisers is expected to be completed by June 2018.

11. The UNICEF global evaluation network convened evaluation staff and key partners, including UNEG, in late 2017 to discuss new ways of strengthening collaboration across all levels of the organization. The network also developed plans for improving the evaluation function in 2018, including strengthening the capacity of staff and methodologies to enhance the quality and timeliness of evaluations; enhancing mechanisms to promote the use of evaluation; and developing measures to expand partnerships for national evaluation capacity development.

III. Promoting evaluation coherence within the United Nations

A. Independent system-wide evaluation of United Nations operational activities for development

12. The need for credible, independent, system-wide evaluation has been a recurrent theme since 2004 (General Assembly resolution 59/250). In the 2012 QCPR (resolution 67/226), the General Assembly provided for the establishment of an independent system-wide evaluation mechanism and reiterated in the 2016 QCPR its call for such a mechanism, specifically underscoring the importance of strengthening a high-quality, independent and impartial system-wide evaluation mechanism of operational activities for development that enhances coherence and interdependence in the overall evaluation architecture of the United Nations development system, using its findings and recommendations to improve the functioning of the system.

13. The Secretary-General, in his July 2017 report to the Economic and Social Council on repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all (A/72/124–E/2018/3), proposed creating capacities for the independent evaluation of system-wide activities. In his December 2017 report, the Secretary-General put forward various measures to strengthen system-wide evaluation at the global and country levels, including the establishment of an independent office focused on strategic, cross-cutting issues relating to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The new office would commission independent system-wide evaluations on strategic development issues, while supporting entities at the country level to undertake joint evaluations on system-wide efforts to advance the implementation of the Goals and strengthening the quality of evaluations within the existing evaluation architecture, including evaluations of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF).

14. Following the Secretary-General's proposals, the Evaluation Office has been working with UNEG to support coordination arrangements for system-wide evaluations to be established by Member States at the global, regional and country levels. UNICEF is also engaged in joint evaluations with other United Nations agencies, recognizing the benefits of promoting learning and shared accountability and of reducing transaction costs, with priority to joint evaluations of UNDAFs and joint programmes. UNICEF has also commenced arrangements with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to jointly evaluate the common chapter in their strategic plans.

B. United Nations Evaluation Group

15. UNEG remains a key mechanism for enhancing the coherence of the United Nations evaluation community, involving United Nations departments, specialized agencies, funds and programmes and affiliated organizations. The Director of Evaluation served as one of four UNEG Vice-Chairs, with responsibility for strengthening partnerships, from May 2014 to May 2017, and was involved in the development of the UNEG partnership strategy. UNICEF evaluation staff also participate in all UNEG task forces, including those on the Sustainable Development Goals, partnerships, professionalization, humanitarian work and evaluation use. Currently, UNICEF is co-managing, together with the International Trade Centre, the midterm review of the UNEG strategy. The UNICEF Evaluation Office also supported advocacy by UNEG around evaluation efforts, particularly through the organization

of a side meeting during the 2017 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

C. Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation steering group and other humanitarian networks

16. The Evaluation Office is a member of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) steering group, which is composed of evaluation directors from several United Nations agencies, non-governmental consortiums and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The steering group coordinates and develops broad strategic guidance and methodological approaches for IAHEs, producing a prioritized list of IAHEs to be conducted, managing them through an IAHE management group and ensuring that they are disseminated and used.

17. The IAHE steering group did not conduct an evaluation in 2017 due to an escalation of the conflict in the intended country (Iraq). A new workplan was subsequently put forward on joint evaluations planned for 2018. Despite constraints in executing the IHAE workplans, UNICEF has stepped up the evaluation of its own performance in humanitarian situations. At least one corporate evaluation and three evaluations of the UNICEF level-3 responses are anticipated in 2018.

18. Furthermore, in 2017, the UNICEF Evaluation Office continued to support the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), which is particularly valuable for its links to decision-makers and its state-of-the-art innovations in the humanitarian field. The Evaluation Office regularly shares the latest ALNAP developments throughout the organization to promote learning. UNICEF facilitates networking opportunities for national partners, and works to increase the profile of evaluation within the broad range of ALNAP priorities. It also contributes to the network by sharing its own evaluation findings. For example, the Evaluation Office presented findings from evaluations on humanitarian performance monitoring and the Ebola crisis at the 2017 ALNAP annual review meeting. In addition, the Evaluation Office facilitated the use by country offices of the ALNAP Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide, which was developed to help humanitarian actors increase the quality and usefulness of evaluation findings and programme results.

IV. Promoting evaluation capacity development globally

Networks for national evaluation capacity development

19. UNICEF continued to contribute to inter-agency efforts and global partnerships for national evaluation capacity development in line with the 2013 UNICEF revised evaluation policy, the 2016 QCPR and General Assembly resolution 69/237.

20. UNICEF also played a significant role in organizing the third Global Evaluation Forum, entitled "Transforming our world through evaluation: engagement and partnerships for the better world we want", held in April in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The event culminated in the endorsement of a partnership statement in which government representatives and parliamentarians, civil society and United Nations organizations and international donors renewed their commitment to more effective national evaluation capacity development.

21. In 2017, UNICEF continued to co-lead, together with the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation, EVALSDGs, a global network that promotes evaluation activities around the Sustainable Development Goals, including

review and follow-up processes. The Evaluation Office remains an active member of the EvalPartners Management Group and of the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation.

22. In response to a peer-review recommendation that UNICEF develop a new strategy of national evaluation capacity development to further advance the organization's work in that area, the Evaluation Office mapped the key relevant initiatives that UNICEF supports. This mapping exercise will guide the development of a corporate strategy clarifying roles and the value added of UNICEF engagement in national evaluation capacity development. It has also generated valuable insights that will enable UNICEF and other United Nations agencies to more effectively support national efforts to develop evaluation capacity. Digital tools are being developed to improve coordination among agencies (see figure I).

Figure I

Example of mapping tool for UNICEF support to national evaluation capacity development

PAK-01
Developing Subnational Evaluation Policies
Sub-national
ROSA
Punjab and Baluchistan provinces, Pakistan
Research and Evaluation Unit, PIPER, UNICEF Pakistan
Pakistan - Punjab and Baluchistan provinces
Government of Punjab and Government of Baluchistan
Planning and Development Department
to formulate strategic policy guidance on role, function and quality standards of evaluations within public sector for all development work at provincial level
2014
2018

V. Performance of the evaluation function

23. The analysis in section V focuses on performance indicators for the UNICEF evaluation function contained in the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 as well as additional indicators used to monitor how evaluation accountabilities were discharged in accordance with the 2013 revised evaluation policy and the plan for global thematic evaluations, 2014–2017. The indicators cover the following:

(a) Evaluations submitted;

(b) Geographical coverage of evaluations;

(c) Thematic distribution of evaluations;

(d) Types of evaluations conducted;

(e) Quality of evaluations

(f) Use of evaluations:

(i) Submission of management responses;

(ii) Implementation of management response actions;

(g) Spending on evaluation;

(h) Production of corporate evaluations.

24. The data presented draw from several sources, including:

(a) The internal evaluation management information system managed by the Evaluation Office, including the Evaluation and Research Database and the Evaluation Management Response Tracking System;

(b) The independent Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS), a quality assessment system managed by the Innovation, Information, Learning and Uptake Unit of UNICEF, with evaluation quality assessments carried out by the independent firm Impact Ready.

25. In addition, each year, Impact Ready produces a global meta-analysis of all evaluations submitted the previous year.[1]

A. Performance under the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 indicators on evaluation

26. Overall, the evaluation function achieved or exceeded the targets of the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 for the evaluation function (see table 1).

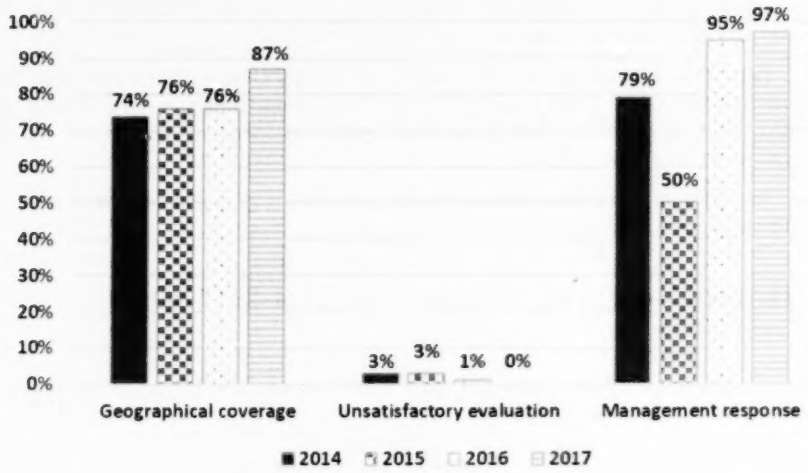
Table 1
Overall trends in indicators of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 for the evaluation function

(percentage)

Strategic Plan indicator	*Baseline (2013)*	*Result*				*Target*		
		2014	*2015*	*2016*	***2017***	*2015*	*2016*	***2017***
Geographical coverage Offices that submitted at least one completed evaluation to the Evaluation and Research Database in the previous three years	75	74	76	76	**87**	75	78	**80**
Quality of evaluations Evaluations rated "unsatisfactory" on the basis of United Nations standards	2	3	3	1	**0**	3	3	**< 3**
Management responses submitted Evaluations submitted with a formal management response	92	79	50	95	**97**	92	92	**92**
Management responses completed Agreed evaluation recommendations completed, as recorded in the Evaluation Management Response Tracking System	36	27	20	33	**46**	30	32	**35**
Management response implementation Evaluation recommendations in the implementation stage, as recorded in the Management Response Tracking System	45	49	44	43	**36**	52	55	**60**

[1] Available from www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_96629.html.

Figure II
Trends in three key performance indicators, 2014–2017



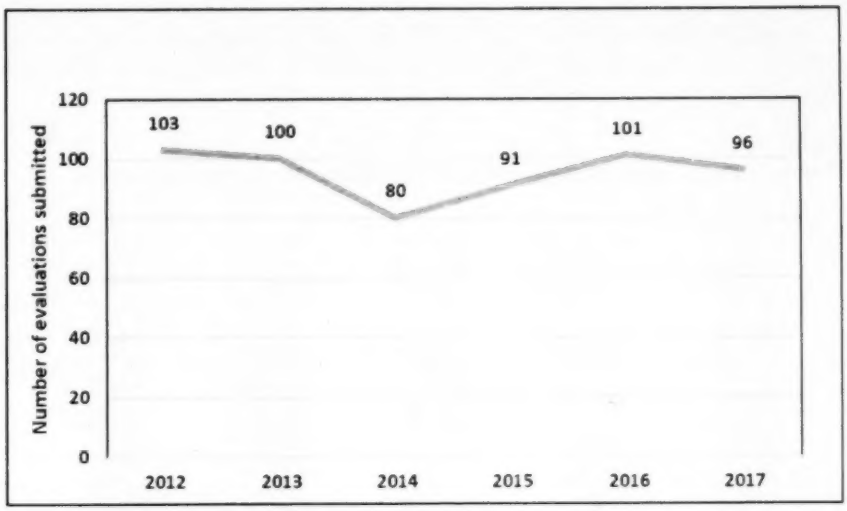
Source: Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

B. Performance under key performance indicators derived from the revised evaluation policy and plan for global thematic evaluations, 2014–2017

Evaluation submission

27. "Evaluations submitted" is defined as the number of evaluations submitted to the Evaluation and Research Database by offices at all levels of the organization. In 2017, 96 evaluative products (89 evaluations, three synthesis evaluations, two reviews and two evaluability assessments) were submitted, a decrease from 101 in 2016. The pattern of the decrease in 2017 is consistent with that of the organizational spending on evaluations for the same year. Spending on evaluations is discussed in section V.

Figure III
Trends in evaluation submissions, 2012–2017



Source: UNICEF Evaluation and Research Database.

28. The number of evaluations submitted varies by region: Europe and Central Asia (ECAR), Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), Latin America and Caribbean (LACR) and West and Central Africa (WCAR) each submitted 13 or more evaluations. East Asia and the Pacific (EAPR) submitted eight evaluations, while the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia (SA) each submitted seven evaluations. It should be noted, however, that SA, which covers highly populous countries, has fewer offices than the other regions.

Table 2
Regional evaluation submission rates, 2012–2017

Year	*EAPR*	*ECAR*	*ESAR*	*HQ*	*LACR*	*MENA*	*SA*	*WCAR*
2012	8	15	28	13	6	5	8	20
2013	8	13	19	6	15	8	4	27
2014	6	15	13	8	8	4	14	12
2015	14	14	17	4	7	8	12	15
2016	11	9	26	10	13	6	13	13
2017	8	16	15	13	13	7	7	17

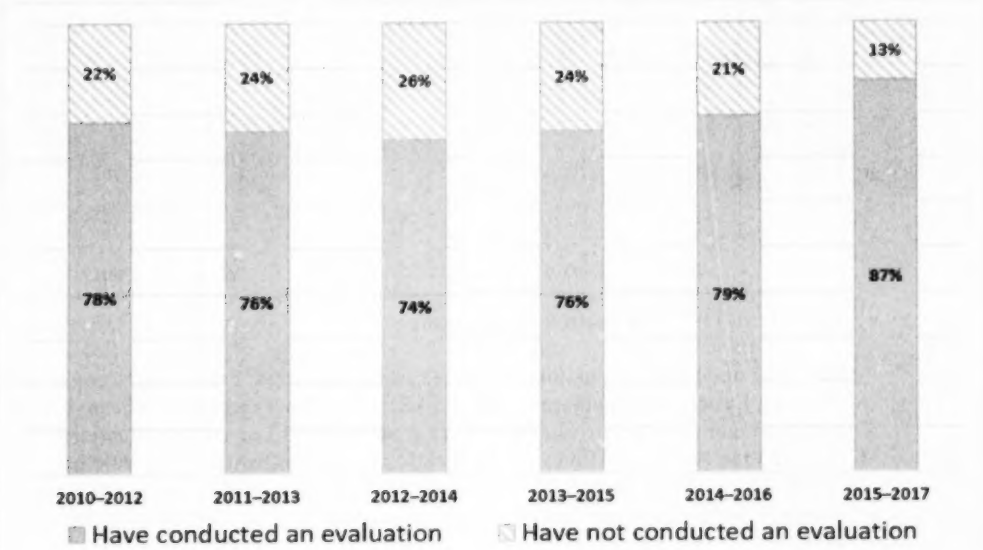
Abbreviations: East Asia and the Pacific (EAPR), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECAR), Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), HQ (headquarters), Latin America and Caribbean (LACR), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia (SA) and West and Central Africa (WCAR).
Source: UNICEF Evaluation and Research Database.

29. In 2018, the Evaluation Office will launch a new integrated database system to provide real-time information on the implementation of evaluation plans so that offices showing slow progress towards targeted evaluations can be promptly supported.

Geographical coverage of evaluations

30. "Geographical coverage" is defined as the proportion of country offices that submitted at least one evaluation report in the past three years. Performance related to geographical coverage improved from 79 per cent of country offices conducting evaluations for the period 2014–2016 to 87 per cent for the period 2015–2017 (see figure IV).

Figure IV
Trends in the geographical coverage of evaluation, 2010–2017, all regions



Source: Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS).

31. The increase in the geographical coverage of evaluations across regions since 2013 is noteworthy. Coverage for the period 2015–2017 shows an improvement across all regions except SA. ECAR and ESAR recorded very high coverage rates, at 91 per cent each, while four regions (EAPR, LACR, MENA and WCAR) were above 80 per cent.

Table 3
Trends in the geographical coverage of evaluation, by region, 2013–2017
(percentage)

Year	*EAPR*	*ECAR*	*ESAR*	*LACR*	*MENA*	*SA*	*WCAR*
2013–2015	73	82	95	56	65	100	76
2014–2016	87	86	82	64	65	100	76
2015–2017	87	91	91	84	82	89	87

Abbreviations: East Asia and the Pacific (EAPR), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECAR), Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), Latin America and Caribbean (LACR), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia (SA) and West and Central Africa (WCAR).
Source: GEROS.

32. To improve geographical coverage, offices with limited capacity and budgets to conduct evaluations are being supported to participate in multi-country evaluations managed by regional offices. Moreover, the revision to the evaluation policy currently under way will provide more detailed criteria and clearer time frames for conducting evaluations, further increasing coverage.

Thematic distribution of evaluations

33. The thematic distribution of evaluations is assessed through an analysis of the distribution of evaluations by Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 outcome area and cross-cutting theme. To this end, UNICEF commissions annually a meta-analysis of evaluations submitted the previous year.

34. An analysis of the 101 evaluation reports submitted in 2016 showed a balanced topical distribution of evaluations (see table 4): child survival (comprising health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)); education; and child protection were the subject of 32 per cent, 13 per cent and 16 per cent of the evaluation portfolio, respectively.[2] In recent years, a significant proportion of evaluations have covered cross-cutting themes, especially gender equality, humanitarian action and social inclusion.

35. The focus on gender equality is notable. A detailed analysis of the Evaluation and Research Database shows that 48 per cent of evaluations covered gender equality as a cross-cutting theme. The newly revised evaluation policy is aimed at ensuring the mainstreaming of gender equality in all evaluations.

36. Humanitarian action is also an important cross-cutting issue in the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017. While one evaluation focused specifically on humanitarian issues, an analysis of the database reveals that 28 percent of evaluations covered humanitarian action as a cross-cutting theme. Given the contexts in which many children live, the new evaluation policy is aimed at increasing evaluation of the various levels of the UNICEF humanitarian response.

37. Evaluations that successfully mainstreamed gender equality as a cross-cutting theme were also strongest in terms of human rights-based approaches, while evaluations that covered humanitarian action as a cross-cutting theme were strongest in terms of evaluation purpose.

Table 4
Thematic distribution of evaluations, 2014–2016[3]
(percentage)

Topic	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*
Sector-specific evaluations, by key results area of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017			
Child survival and development	23	22	32
Health	13	15	14
Nutrition	0	1	10
Water, sanitation and hygiene	10	6	8
Education	32	28	13
Child protection	6	25	16
HIV/AIDS	4	7	6

[2] 2016 Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System meta-analysis.
[3] Analysis of thematic distribution for 2017 evaluations will be finalized in mid-2018.

Topic	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*
Social inclusion	1	2	12
Total sector-specific evaluations	**66**	**84**	**79**
Other evaluations (cross-cutting, organizational performance)	**34**	**16**	**21**

Source: GEROS.

Type and purpose of evaluations conducted

38. The GEROS meta-analysis further shows that 91 per cent of evaluations were at the outcome and impact levels. Only 6 per cent of evaluations focused on the output level. The focus on outcome and impact levels demonstrates an appropriate use of evaluation to better understand the organization's contributions to results for children.

39. Regarding the purpose of the evaluations, there was a balanced distribution across summative, formative and mixed purposes, albeit with a slight predominance of formative evaluations. A total of 72 per cent of evaluations were either formative or mixed purpose.

40. For the period under review, 85 per cent of reports submitted were managed directly by UNICEF offices. Ten percent of evaluations were managed jointly with other United Nations agencies, Governments and funding partners.[4]

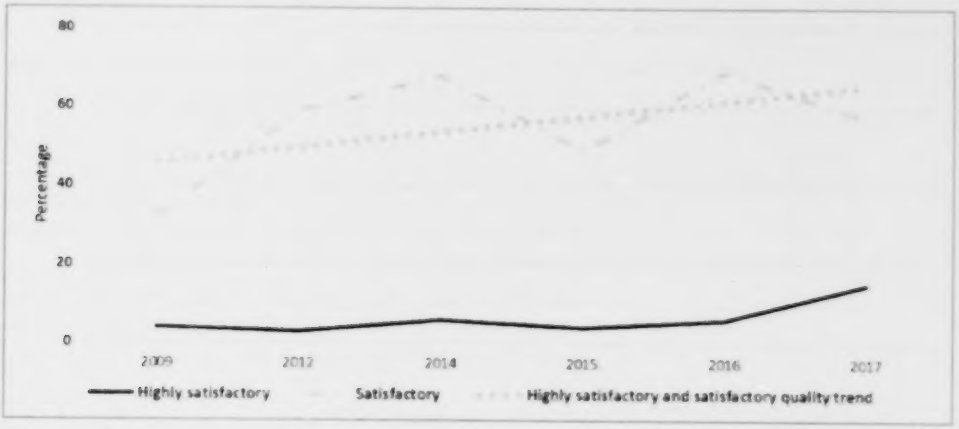
Quality of UNICEF evaluations

41. The Evaluation Office has supported the entire function to improve the percentage of reports rated "highly satisfactory" and "satisfactory" and thus meeting United Nations standards and norms. The percentage of evaluations rated "highly satisfactory" increased significantly, from 6 per cent in 2016 to 14.8 per cent in 2017, while the percentage rated "satisfactory" fell from 69 percent in 2016 to 56.8 percent in 2017. Evaluations rated "fair" decreased from 36 per cent in 2016 to 28.4 per cent in 2017. There were no "unsatisfactory" reports in 2017.

42. A graphic representation of these ratings (see figure V) reveals an upward trend in quality improvement over the years, and it is anticipated that this trajectory will continue. The Evaluation Office will continue to provide support at all levels to ensure that quality is maintained.

[4] The management of 5 per cent of the evaluation portfolio falls under other arrangements.

Figure V
Trend in quality of evaluations, 2009–2017: satisfactory and highly-satisfactory ratings



Source: GEROS.

43. Evaluations were also assessed in terms of quality by type of evaluation. Overall, 68.3 per cent of the impact- and outcome-level evaluations were rated "highly satisfactory" or "satisfactory" (see table 5).

Table 5
Evaluation focus and quality, 2016

	Number of evaluations				
Focus	*Highly satisfactory*	*Satisfactory*	*Fair*	*Unsatisfactory*	***Total***
Impact	3	29	9	0	**41**
Outcome	3	34	12	1	**50**
Output	0	3	3	0	**6**

Note: The evaluation focus of 4 of the 101 evaluation reports assessed through GEROS could not be determined. Therefore, those reports are not included in the table.
Source: GEROS.

United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

44. UNICEF also monitors and reports on its evaluation performance against key indicators set out in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. For evaluations submitted in 2016, the aggregated average score for UNICEF was 6.2, which is classified as "approaching requirements". This represents a year-on-year improvement, with UNICEF having reported a rating of 6 in the previous cycle. The rating is also consistent with that of similar United Nations entities.

45. Evaluations in 2016 were slightly stronger in integrating gender than was the case in 2015. UNICEF remains committed to improving its performance under the Action Plan, the aim of which is to ensure that gender analysis is used to inform evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. The Evaluation Office will

make use of evaluations from MENA and SA as good practice in this regard, as ratings from those regions are significantly above the average for the Action Plan overall.

Use of evaluation, including management responses

Submission of management responses

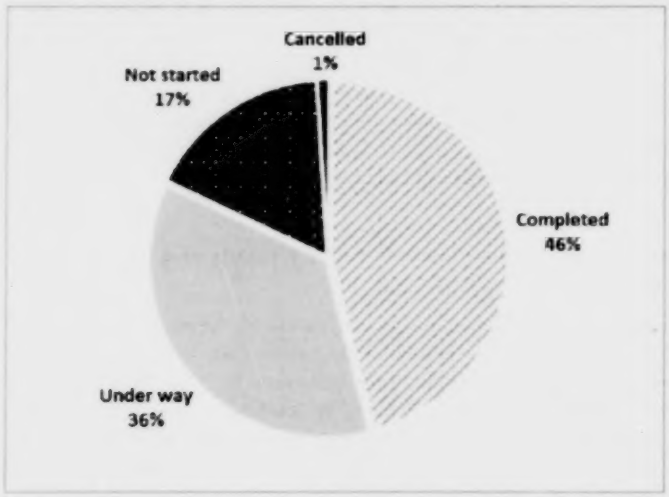
46. Management response is a key feature of the evaluation cycle. In its decision 2016/7, the Executive Board urged UNICEF to prioritize the timely delivery of management responses and to improve the rate of implementation of agreed evaluation recommendations. In its decision 2018/2, the Board requested UNICEF to present a formal management response with each evaluation report setting out actions and a timetable for implementation. In response, UNICEF has acted, in line with the evaluation policy, to ensure that all evaluation reports uploaded onto the Evaluation and Research Database are accompanied by a formal management response.

47. Consequently, the Evaluation Management Response Tracking System shows that 3 per cent of all evaluations submitted in the previous year lack a management response, an improvement from 5 per cent the previous year.

Implementation of management response actions

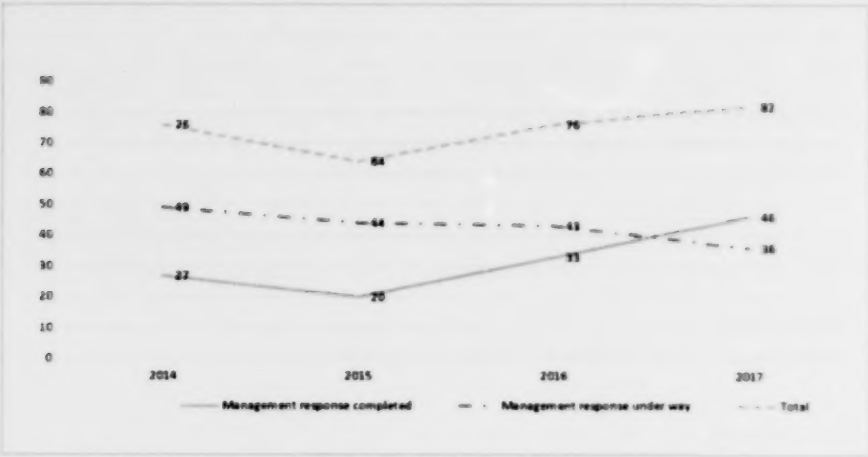
48. To ensure that evaluation recommendations are acted upon, management response actions are to be completed within one year. In 2017, 82 per cent of actions listed in the management responses to evaluations conducted in 2016 had been initiated (46 per cent completed and 36 per cent under way), while 17 per cent of the actions had yet to be initiated (see figure VI). This represents an improvement from 2015, when 76 per cent of the agreed actions set out in management responses had been completed (33 per cent) or were under way (43 per cent) at the end of 2016 (see figure VII).

Figure VI
Implementation of management response actions, 2017



Source: Evaluation Management Response Tracking System.

Figure VII
Trends in the implementation of evaluation management responses, 2014–2017
(percentage)



Source: Evaluation Management Response Tracking System

49. Further analysis shows variations across regions at the end of 2016: LACR, EAPR, SA, ECAR, and MENA showed good progress, with 91 per cent, 88 per cent, 86 per cent, 83 per cent and 80 per cent of their actions completed or under way, respectively. ESAR and WCAR also made progress, with 78 per cent and 74 per cent of actions under way or completed, respectively (see table 6). The Evaluation Office will continue to encourage offices to implement their management responses on time, and will regularly monitor the situation through the Evaluation Management Response Tracking System. To this end, new evaluation management response guidance will be issued in 2018, together with an improved system to enable the closer tracking of management response implementation.

Table 6
Management response implementation, 2016
(percentage)

	Action status			
Region	*Completed*	*Under way*	*Not started*	*Cancelled*
EAPR	68	20	11	1
ECAR	50	33	17	0
ESAR	45	33	22	0
HQ	18	70	12	0
LACR	53	38	7	2
MENA	59	21	20	0
SA	53	33	14	0
WCAR	41	33	25	1

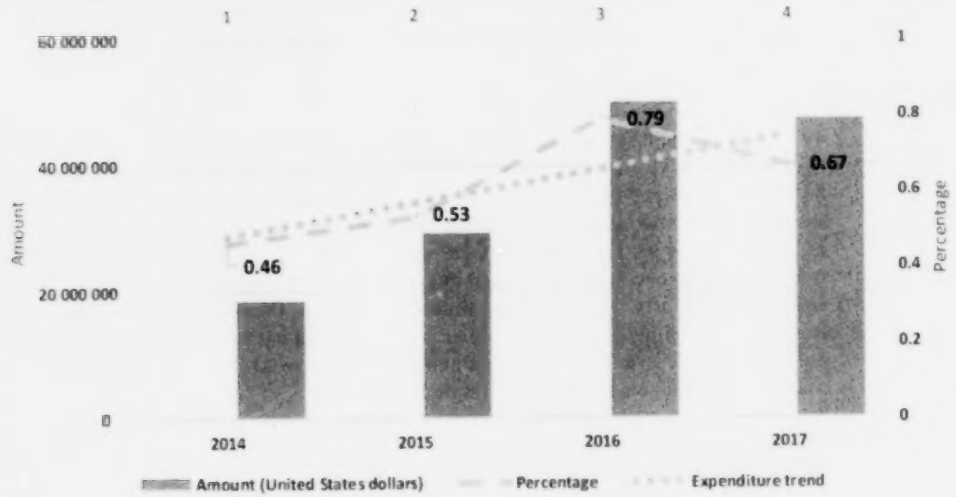
Abbreviations: East Asia and the Pacific (EAPR), Europe and Central Asia (ECAR), Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAR), headquarters (HQ), Latin America and Caribbean (LACR), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia (SA) and West and Central Africa (WCAR).
Source: Evaluation Management Response Tracking System.

Spending on evaluation

50. The revised UNICEF evaluation policy of 2013 set a target for spending on evaluation of 1 per cent of total programme expenditure. At the end of 2017, this indicator was reported to be at 0.67 per cent. An analysis of evaluation budget use for the period 2016–2017 shows that spending on evaluation increased in both dollar and percentage terms. At the beginning of the implementation period for the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017, an estimated $18.7 million was spent on evaluation. This figure had increased to $47.5 million by the end of 2017, indicating a greater commitment of resources towards evaluation. The percentage had also risen from 0.46 per cent to 0.67 per cent by the end of the period (see figure VIII).

51. The revised evaluation policy of 2018 will provide for a pooled fund to support evaluation capacity development, especially at the decentralized level; organization-wide professionalization; innovation in evaluation; and strategic evaluations.

Figure VIII
Trend in the use of evaluation budget, 2014–2017



Source: Global Evaluation Function Performance Dashboard.

Corporate-level evaluations

52. Activities considered under this indicator are corporate-level evaluations undertaken by the Evaluation Office. These include evaluations listed under the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014–2017 and the review and update for 2016–2017 (E/ICEF/2016/3).

53. The Evaluation Office made all the evaluations available to the Executive Board and the general public in 2017. Moreover, four corporate evaluations/reviews and the accompanying management responses were presented at informal consultations and sessions of the Executive Board during the year. These included:

(a) Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa 2014–2015;

(b) DAC-UNEG peer review of the Evaluation Function of UNICEF;

(c) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): Review of development effectiveness, 2012–2015;

(d) Evaluation of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme.

54. In addition, the following corporate evaluative products were finalized or initiated in 2017, in line with the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014–2017: review and update for 2016–2017.

Evaluation of the H4+ Joint Programme (joint initiative of six United Nations agencies for technical support of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health)

55. H4+ is a joint programme of UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (later joined by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) aimed at leveraging the respective agencies' strengths and coordinating assistance to accelerate the progress of the health-related Millennium Development Goals. The evaluation, completed in 2017, was jointly managed by UNFPA, UNICEF and Global Affairs Canada. The evaluation and the management response were presented to the joint informal consultation of the Executive Boards of UNICEF and UNFPA in January 2018.

56. The evaluation found that the programme helped the H4+ partners working at the country level to develop a new type of collaboration, resulting in an increase in the volume and coherence of their policy engagement and advocacy, particularly in translating global guidance into national policy support. Several results are likely to be sustained after programme completion, including improved and updated national policies, guidelines and training curricula as well as the system-wide strengthening of maternal-death surveillance and response. However, in targeted, underserved and isolated areas, gains in the availability and quality of services were more at risk, due to weak exit plans. The programme was deemed to need more systematic attention to documentation and more-developed systems and approaches to knowledge management to increase a shared understanding of lessons learned.

57. Efforts to strengthen health systems for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health encountered policy and resource constraints, including in human resources for health, health financing, transport infrastructure and electricity as well as in the lack of reliable clean water in health facilities. H4+ partners were not as effective in collectively advocating for intensified efforts to address these wider, cross-sectoral constraints. Finally, the programme did not take full advantage of the World Bank's role in supporting national Governments in health programmes and other critical sectors.

Towards improved emergency responses: synthesis of UNICEF evaluations of humanitarian action 2010–2016

58. The overarching aims of the synthesis evaluation, which covered 30 humanitarian evaluations, were to support accountability, contribute to learning and help UNICEF to realize its humanitarian objectives for vulnerable children. The evaluation and the management response were presented at the 2018 first regular session of the Executive Board.

59. The synthesis tells an encouraging story of progress and improvement. UNICEF is shown to have learned from experience and adapted its approach to become faster and more effective, while contributing to the wider reforms of the humanitarian system. It reflects an organization that has evolved considerably since the learning

experiences of Haiti in 2010. New procedures have been implemented, new ways of working developed and learning generated and shared. Reforms to the wider humanitarian system, in which UNICEF has played a prominent role, are reflected in improvements in inter-agency coordination in addition to UNICEF corporate and operational practice.

60. In line with its fundamental ethos of ground-based action for children in emergencies, the synthesis found UNICEF humanitarian responses to be mostly relevant. Programming was also strongly aligned, where feasible, with national responses, priorities and plans. UNICEF takes its responsibilities as a humanitarian actor seriously, participating in joint responses to emergencies and prioritizing partnerships. Overall, the synthesis shows some important results for children facing conflict and crisis. UNICEF has contributed to the reduced transmission of disease, helped to prevent hunger and undernutrition and provided clean water and education to many vulnerable children. It has protected children in high-threat environments and built the capacity of local and national actors in humanitarian situations.

61. Specific areas identified by the evaluations of humanitarian responses as needing improvement include:

(a) Needs assessments for affected populations, even under accessible conditions, are sometimes incomplete or too general, leading to limited or absent strategic frameworks or designs. Consequently, opportunity-based, rather than needs-based, programming persists in the initial response. The evaluations revealed that where assumptions made at the design stage subsequently proved to be incorrect, UNICEF often quickly reoriented the programme to achieve relevance;

(b) Commitments on accountability to affected populations require a more proactive, consistent and strategic approach;

(c) The building of clear links between humanitarian and development responses needs improvement. Planning for transition and resilience has, at times, suffered constraints, including a lack of external funding.

62. As part of the synthesis of evaluations of UNICEF humanitarian action, a synthesis evaluation of UNICEF action in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in humanitarian situations was conducted to assess: (a) the organization's performance in humanitarian action in WASH over the period 2010–2016, and whether it had improved over time; (b) factors that supported or constrained improvement; and (c) lessons that could be learned to improve WASH programmes. The synthesis, which reviewed findings from 26 evaluations of UNICEF humanitarian action in WASH, found that UNICEF emergency WASH responses in the field performed well overall, given the challenging contexts in which they were carried out and the funding and staffing constraints. Areas in which a positive trend was identified included the application of the rapid response mechanism and increased accountability to affected populations. Areas in which no clear improvement over time was identified included emergency preparedness, needs assessments, resilience-oriented response and data/monitoring of cost effectiveness. This points to a need for a more consistent mechanism for learning and for disseminating and applying knowledge and good practices generated through experience. The UNICEF WASH response is still in the learning phase when it comes to working in urban settings and with cash/voucher systems. Considerable potential exists for learning and further advancing these increasingly high-priority items on the humanitarian agenda.

Evaluation of UNICEF strategies and programmes to reduce stunting in children under 5 years of age

63. This global synthesis report presented a comprehensive evaluation of UNICEF work to address child stunting. The evaluation covered a six-year period (2010–2015), when the global community was shifting its focus from reducing the number of underweight children to reducing the number of stunted children. The evaluation and management response have been completed and will be presented at the 2018 annual session of the Executive Board.

64. The evaluation found clear evidence of the leadership role played by UNICEF and the importance placed on strategic partnerships and alliances. It also demonstrated the ways in which those partnerships and alliances were facilitated by the organization's technical expertise and recognized credibility with regard to children and nutrition, albeit with variations across regions and countries. The UNICEF approach to the Scaling Up Nutrition initiative provided a framework for stunting-reduction activities among partners. However, the Strategic Plan, 2014–2017 should have better promoted cross-sectoral and inter-agency coordination in carrying out these approaches. UNICEF country programmes provided multiple examples of successful advocacy and progress towards achieving such relevant outputs as the improvement of policy frameworks and an increase in government commitment and capacity-building at the national, subnational and front-line worker levels. The evaluation documents a growing focus on multisectoral approaches, although clear examples of the implementation of those approaches as part of country programmes were found in only half the countries.

Joint evaluability assessment of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage

This joint assessment examined the extent to which progress towards the objectives and results of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage could be readily and reliably measured, monitored and evaluated. To achieve this purpose, the assessment examined the programme design and theory of change on the assumption that a well-designed programme produces better results. It also studied the reporting of progress and results, the adequacy of resources to meet the objectives and the monitoring and evaluation system for ensuring learning and accountability.

65. While noting the importance of the programme, the assessment found that:

(a) There were opportunities to improve the programme design and global theory of change;

(b) The global results framework required significant refinement to enable meaningful results tracking;

(c) The value addition and potential of a joint programme was not being fully realized;

(d) The funding was unpredictable and short-term, posing a significant challenge to a global programme aimed at long-term social change;

(e) There was a need to establish a "proof of concept" to learn what combination of strategies worked best to reduce child marriage;

(f) Baselines for prevalence and outputs were in place, but those for outcomes needed to be established.

This evaluability assessment, which has been completed, and the management response (in progress) will be shared with the Executive Board in mid-2018.

Evaluation of the Out-of-School Children Initiative

66. In partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Global Partnership for Education, the evaluation began in April 2017 with the aim of assessing progress towards a substantial and sustainable reduction in the number of out-of-school children. The evaluation examines effectiveness in providing technical and financial support and in communicating programme results. It also analyses government buy-in and the use of evidence from the studies for education sector policy and planning processes. The report will be finalized and shared in 2018.

Impact evaluation of early childhood development kits in Senegal

67. The twofold purpose of the evaluation is to (a) evaluate the impact of early childhood development (ECD) kit interventions on children's psychosocial well-being, early learning and development in humanitarian and development contexts; and (b) evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches for improving caregiver interactions with children and the use of the ECD kits for early learning and development. The evaluation compares the implementation of the foundational ECD kit intervention to an enhanced ECD kit intervention after a period of approximately one year. The report will be finalized and shared in 2018.

Humanitarian evaluation in Uganda

68. The evaluation is a direct response to the level-3 emergency in South Sudan that has displaced families into neighbouring Uganda, which currently hosts around 1 million refugees. On average, as many as 4,000 South Sudanese are said to cross the border into Uganda daily, fuelling Africa's largest refugee crisis. The evaluation is taking place in the world's largest refugee settlement, Bidibidi, in the Yumbe district, in northern Uganda, to which 275,000 women and children have fled from conflict. The evaluation is under way and will be finalized and shared in 2018.

Evaluation of the coverage and quality of the UNICEF response in complex humanitarian situations

69. The Evaluation Office has initiated work on this evaluation, which is being conducted in support of the cross-cutting priority and related change strategy on humanitarian action outlined in the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. The objectives of the evaluation are: (a) to assess the coverage and quality of UNICEF humanitarian action on the basis of a sample of complex high-threat environments, including identifying internal and external enabling factors and challenges; (b) to identify internal and external enabling factors for and challenges to the fulfilment by UNICEF of its protection mandate in complex humanitarian evaluations, including its designated role in the monitoring and reporting mechanism resulting from Security Council resolutions on children affected by armed conflict; and (c) to capture good practices and innovations that are improving humanitarian action in complex high-threat environments and analyse their potential for more general application by UNICEF.

70. An in-depth scoping of the evaluation was undertaken in 2017 to ensure that it was informed by evidence, including identifying any evaluability issues. The scoping identified the evaluation's rationale and purpose as well as objectives, scope and methodological options. The terms of reference for the comprehensive evaluation were also set out. The Evaluation Office commissioned a learning phase exercise aimed at gathering the views of country and regional offices on the challenges they faced in achieving coverage and quality in their humanitarian response, and to identify good practices to be investigated more fully. The evaluation will cover 12 country case studies (five country-visit case studies and seven case studies based on

document review and remote interviews). The evaluation is being implemented in two phases: inception/pilot and main evaluation.

Strengthening child protection systems: evaluation of UNICEF strategies and programme performance

71. In 2017, the Evaluation Office initiated a formative evaluation to examine the organization's leadership role, strategies and programme performance in strengthening child protection systems. The evaluation will assess past and current approaches to child protection systems strengthening and generate learning on effective approaches, including: (a) UNICEF contributions to legal reform; (b) the use of upstream policy work; (c) multisectoral engagement; (d) child protection financing; (e) governance and coordination; (f) capacity development; (g) service delivery; (h) data and knowledge management; and (i) partnerships, among other areas. The evaluation will be finalized in late 2018 and the report shared in 2019.

Evaluation of the UNICEF contribution to health systems strengthening

72. In 2017, the Evaluation Office initiated a prospective, formative evaluation of the work of UNICEF in health systems strengthening (HSS), one of the three pillars of the organization's Strategy for Health 2016–2030. The successful roll-out and implementation of the HSS approach will require changes in both the working methods of UNICEF and the activities that they support. The evaluation will examine two separate but interrelated domains: (a) the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, equity focus and sustainability of the HSS approach at the organizational level during the transitional period; and (b) HSS programming at the implementation level in specific focus areas, assessing the evaluability of results and their likely sustainability. The evaluation will be finalized in late 2018 and the report shared in 2019.

Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan

73. In 2017, the Evaluation Office conducted an analytical review of the Gender Action Plan, 2014–2017, which provided an analysis of related documentation issued in the period 2008–2017. The review was commissioned to address two needs: (a) to support a potential future evaluation of the development, design and implementation of the plan; and (b) to inform ongoing discussions about the Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 and the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021. The exercise provided important findings regarding the Gender Action Plan in terms of conceptual clarity, the selection of targeted priorities, implementation capacity, mainstreaming, partnerships and knowledge management as well as implications for the future. The report will be an important resource for the evaluation of the Gender Action Plan, 2014–2017, which will commence in the second half of 2018.

Evaluation of the UNICEF-UNFPA joint programme on female genital mutilation/cutting

74. This scoping exercise was jointly commissioned by UNICEF and UNFPA, with UNFPA as the lead agency. The exercise informed the drafting of the terms of reference for the forthcoming evaluation, which is expected to start in mid-2018.

VI. Assessment of the evaluation function

75. DAC-UNEG peer reviews identify good practices and opportunities for strengthening the evaluation function in the agency under review, with a view to contributing to improved performance in the delivery of the agency's mandate. The

2017 peer review of the UNICEF evaluation function noted many recent positive findings: improvement in the quality of evaluation over time; significant improvement in compliance with management responses; the active role of the Evaluation Office in the international evaluation community and in strengthening national evaluation capacity development; and the commitment of UNICEF to achieving the target of allocating a minimum of 1 per cent of programme expenditure to evaluation.

76. Despite this progress, the overall assessment of the review against the three core UNEG norms of independence, credibility and utility rated the UNICEF evaluation function either "short of satisfactory" (independence and credibility) or "close to satisfactory" (utility), on a binary scale of satisfactory/unsatisfactory.

77. UNICEF accepted most of the recommendations and is making progress in implementing the management response. To date, 97 per cent of actions have been initiated (26 per cent have been completed and 71 per cent are under way). Some of the completed actions include: (a) the establishment of the external Evaluation Advisory Panel; (b) the reflection in the plan for global evaluations of the evaluation priorities for the whole organization; (c) the revision of the evaluation policy to address some of the review's key recommendations; (d) the revision of the evaluation key performance indicators; and (e) the establishment of a pooled fund to help support more evaluations.

78. During the past two years, independent external assessments of the performance of the UNICEF evaluation function have provided useful suggestions and pointed to important lessons on further strengthening the function. Through the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021 and the revised evaluation policy, UNICEF has put in place a series of strategies in response to those suggestions and lessons. They include the following:

(a) *Increased capacity at the decentralized level to conduct and manage evaluations*. When established, the proposed pooled-funding mechanism will help to ensure the needed capacity for evaluations at the regional and country levels;

(b) *The improvement of organizational learning through the use of evaluation findings and recommendations*. A knowledge management unit is being established in the Evaluation Office to improve the use of evaluations. Collaborative "work streams" are being developed with regional offices on technical guidance for areas in need of improvement, including the conduct and use of country programme evaluations, evaluability assessments and humanitarian evaluations.

(c) *The acceleration of national evaluation capacity development through the expansion of partnerships with other United Nations entities and global evaluation networks*;

(d) *The increased timeliness of evaluations for greater usefulness through a review of work processes and methodologies*.

VII. Conclusion

79. 2017 was an important year for the UNICEF evaluation function. The peer review outlined key recommendations for improving the function, most of which were endorsed by the management response. The governance of the function continued to improve with the expansion of the Audit Advisory Committee to include an evaluation expert and the establishment of the external Evaluation Advisory Panel. UNICEF continued to engage through UNEG on the proposals of the Secretary-General to strengthen system-wide evaluation. The mapping of initiatives in national evaluation

capacity development also laid the foundation for more effective engagement at the country level.

80. Overall, the performance of the evaluation function showed improvement in the geographical coverage of evaluations and a portfolio oriented towards outcome- and impact-level evaluations. In addition, the requirement of the evaluation policy for a management response to every evaluation was almost universally adhered to, and there have been indications that measures taken to monitor the implementation of management responses are working. Evaluations that are independently assessed as highly satisfactory are also increasing.

81. Nevertheless, there is a need to increase the number of evaluations that are submitted each year by all levels of the organization. There is a strong suggestion that the number of evaluations is related to the level of spending on evaluation. Evaluation spending dropped from 0.8 per cent of total programme spending in 2016 to 0.67 per cent in 2017. The decrease in spending and in the number of evaluations was especially noticeable at the country level in three regions.

82. The fast-changing context in which UNICEF operates requires timely ways of generating evaluation evidence. The evaluation function will review its methodologies to this end. Furthermore, considering that the UNICEF response to crises has grown considerably (from 294 humanitarian situations in 98 country offices in 2014 to 344 humanitarian situations in 108 offices in 2016), the evaluation function will be more focused on generating the necessary evidence on what is working (or not) in such contexts.

83. The revision of the evaluation policy will ensure that the necessary conditions are provided for improvements in all the performance indicators, including the number of submissions each year and the geographical coverage of evaluations as well as quality, use and spending. The revision of the evaluation policy will also ensure that UNICEF is well equipped to further support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 2016 QCPR. The UNICEF evaluation function will work with sister agencies and Member States to produce credible and timely evaluation evidence that will promote learning and continuous improvement and deepen accountability for achieving results for children, especially the most vulnerable.

VIII. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report for 2017 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2018/15).